COMMUNAL SLOT SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR OPERATING SAME

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to gaming machine systems, and particularly gaming machine systems in which a communal slot machine game can be played on gaming machines that are linked together, and a method by which the gaming machines are allowed to operate by receiving communal results from a central gaming machine system.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The market in gaming machines is largely divided between slot machines and Multi-terminal Gaming Machines. A slot machine generally includes a plurality of moving reels, either real or simulated, disposed parallel to each other, and having a number of faces upon which various symbols are marked. Following activation by a player the reels are rotated a predetermined or random number of times in a slot machine (moving reel type) game. Once the reels stop they each show a face, and the combination of symbols shown on the faces determines whether the player receives a payout or not. Traditionally a slot machine is a standalone unit where every result is determined within that unit. Although in some arrangements additional jackpots may join a number of machines together, the results for that unit, as they relate to that machine, determines all the standard slot machine game results. That is, one person using one machine will not determine whether another person using another machine wins or loses on a particular draw. Such arrangements are within regulatory requirements for standalone machines.

The rules regulating multi-terminal machines are somewhat different. Traditionally, these games have been Casino-style table games like Blackjack and Roulette, where a group of players play against or for a common result. Generally such games pit each user independently against the house, such that again whether one player wins or loses will not affect the results of another player. It is because of the style of the game that such machines can be linked within regulatory requirements. The layout of these units typically involves a

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EV346748739US

number of stations (generally from 2 to 12) linked to a central display or results console.

The advantage of these linked machines for the operator is that they are able to earn higher returns. This is achieved by allowing the user to gamble at higher bet levels. Typically a slot machine is differentiated from a multi-terminal machine in that the maximum bet on a slot machine is typically $10 whereas it is typically $100 for the multi-terminal machine.

OBJECT OF THE INVENTION

It is therefore an object of this invention to provide a gaming machine system and method of operating such with which higher returns can be achieved from a slot machine game whilst remaining within regulatory guidelines. There are also potential advantages in cost per player, and in the communal, shared play being enjoyable for players.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

With the above object in mind the present invention provides in one aspect a gaming machine system including:

processing means for determining a result of a slot machine game; and

a plurality of terminals linked via communication means to the processing means, the outcome at each terminal being solely dependent on the single, communal result determined by the processing means.

In the preferred system the processing means is operatively coupled to or includes at least one display means (unit) to enable players to view communal results determined by the processing means. Ideally the processing means is also adapted to determine individual payouts for each terminal based on wagers made at the terminal and the communal result determined by the processing means.

Ideally, the processing means determines results at predetermined intervals, and the time to the next interval may be displayed on the display means and/or each terminal.

A plurality of display means may be included for easier viewing.

Each terminal may include a player interface that displays a history of player wagers, previous communal results, or other selected data. The player interface may also assist the player to place wagers on the slot machine game.

In a further aspect, the present invention provides a method of operating a gaming machine system having processing means and a plurality of terminals linked to the processing means including the steps of:

at least one player making a wager at a respective terminal;

the processing means determining the result of a slot machine game at a predetermined interval or time;

providing the same result to all terminals as a communal result; and

awarding any payouts to the at least one player dependent on the communal result and size of wager made by the player.

Preferably once the communal result is determined the processing means displays the time remaining until the next slot machine game.

In yet another aspect, the present invention provides a method of playing a communal slot machine game on a gaming machine system, including the steps of:

players making wagers at respective terminals included in said gaming machine system;

when said wagers have been made, rotating a plurality of moving reels included in said gaming machine system a predetermined or random number of times, each moving reel having symbols marked on faces thereof;

stopping the rotation of said moving reels to display a combination of said symbols representing a communal result; and

providing said communal result to all of said terminals, the outcome at each terminal being solely dependent on said communal result.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a conceptual diagram of an exemplary configuration of a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The present invention capitalises on higher maximum bets allowable for linked machines whilst still providing a slot machine (moving reel type) game, whereby a central result is dispensed to a series of linked terminals or consoles.

The preferred system of the present invention can be played on a plurality of linked consoles which are, for example, each built similar to a standard slot machine so as to provide users with a familiar outlook. Each console can be linked to a central display via communication means, such as a wired or wireless hook up. This central display is incorporated as part of a central display unit (display means) which is responsible for determining a single result of a slot machine game effective and common for all consoles, such that the outcome of the players' wagers at each console is solely dependent on this single result.

That is, a single slot machine game is performed for each of the linked gaming consoles participating in the game. Each player of each console makes an individual wager on the result of the game (i.e., on each move of the moving reels) which is communal to all of the participating consoles. The game is conducted and the single result thereof is effective for each of the participating consoles. Accordingly, the outcome of each of the players' wagers, i.e., win, loss or even, at each participating console, and therefore the payout, depends on this communal game result and on no other factor. Consequently, the players are advantageously enabled to make higher wagers on the slot machine game than is conventionally provided by regulation.

In playing the game, a player is required to undertake no actions other than to select a wager. That is, it is not necessary for a player to initiate the game, rather the central display unit provides the game play and determines a result of the game, preferably at predetermined times or intervals. Ideally the central display unit determines the result, displays the result, and calculates all winning bets based on the individual wagers to provide the individual console outcomes.

In the preferred system the linked player consoles are merely used as a terminal for the players to insert money and make wagers on the game. The terminals may have a player interface which displays a history of player wagers, previous results, or other selected data and may assist the player in making wagers on the game by providing information on the game and the manner of

placing bets. The consoles need not determine any results themselves if so required by regulatory requirements. If desired, a much simpler terminal can be used rather than a conventional slot machine. For example simple wagering terminals could be arranged in a bar or other area with a large, central display.

In more detail, in the present invention a communal slot system is provided in which the game played is a slot machine game using moving (rotating) reels, rather than the aforementioned standard simulated Casino-style table games played on multi-terminal machines. The result of the game is a result as created on a slot machine and is a common result to all players on the individual consoles linked to the same central display unit. The players are rewarded for their wager on the game based on the prizes generated by lines and other combinations of symbols displayed on the moving reels.

The central display unit (central controller) determines a result every x units of time (e.g., seconds or minutes) and displays it on a standard display medium. The display unit, and also a screen of each of the individual consoles if desired, shows the number of lines played (selectable from 1 to y, where y is the maximum lines available) and the amount bet per line. The determined result is then fed to the individual consoles dependent on the bet configuration so as to attribute any winnings (payouts) to the players based on their bets.

In summary of the above description, the present invention provides a system and method which creates a slot machine game with a communal result that allows players to experience games together where all players wager their individual bets on the one result of the game.

Referring now to Figure 1 a conceptual diagram of an exemplary arrangement of the present invention is shown. The central controller (1) monitors all player activity on the individual consoles (terminals) (3) linked thereto via communication means (4) and keeps a record of all player transactions and game results. The controller (1) accepts all bet configurations in an allocated timeframe, and then dispenses the result of the game once the game has been played out. For example, in a slot machine game a number of moving reels are rotated to result in a random drawing of a combination of symbols. Winnings are then awarded to the players in accordance with their particular wagers based on the correspondence of this resulting combination with predetermined winning

combinations. As such, upon completion of the game through the generation of the result, the relevant winnings (payouts) are awarded to each console (3) that played that game.

The system and method of the present invention is also applicable to the playing of a game having a jackpot mode, in which the controller (1) may, for example, generate and display several consecutive results and award any resulting jackpot amount based on the players' initial wagers. Other game modes and betting configurations possible for slot machine games are also included within the scope of the system and method of the present invention.

The individual consoles (3), which act as automated transaction stations, record all player bets and previous results and are used to place individual bets. These consoles (3) are independent of each other in all respects except their common link to the result determination.

All results that are generated by the controller (1) may be visually displayed via a designated display unit (display means) (2) that also provides a visual representation of the game being played. This representation may show the random drawing of the combinations and all resulting winning combinations, and display a countdown to each game (i.e., the time remaining until the result of the next game is to be determined) based on the time allocation of the x units of time.

In the above description the controller (1) acts as processing means of the gaming machine system according to the present invention and the display unit (2) is provided in addition thereto, however the controller and display unit may alternatively both be part of the processing means in accordance with the present invention as shown by the dashed line box in Figure 1.

Depending on the specific application in which the system and method of the present invention is being utilised a number of display units (2) may be included for easier viewing by players, or in circumstances where the controller (1) is linked to consoles (3) in remote locations from the controller (1), such as in an adjoining room.

As described in the foregoing, the present invention involves the use of a slot machine game as a central determinant of game results to a number of players selecting wagers on the game. In this way a number of terminals playing

a slot machine game can be linked as a multi-terminal gaming machine within regulatory requirements, since the results of the game are independent of the players' actions on the individual terminals. As a result, a higher return is provided for the players of the slot machine game than is typically possible for players of standalone slot gaming machines.

Whilst the system and method of the present invention has been summarised and explained by illustrative example it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that many widely varying embodiments and applications are within the teaching and scope of the present invention, and that the examples presented herein are by way of illustration only and should not be construed as limiting the scope of this invention.